



NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release:
May 7, 2015

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North Dakota Department of Health Encourages HIV and HCV Testing

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Department of Health (NDDoH) reminds residents that even though we may not hear of HIV infection as often as we used to, it remains a serious disease that can spread throughout a community and cause medical complications for those who test positive for the virus. A recent outbreak of HIV in a small, rural Indiana community has highlighted the potential for HIV infection to reach outbreak status even in rural settings. In that outbreak, there have been 135 newly diagnosed HIV cases in a community of about 4,200 people. The Indiana outbreak of HIV also has a high co-infection rate for hepatitis C virus (HCV), and both diseases have likely been spread by shared use of injection drug needles. In North Dakota, there has been an increase of HCV diagnoses among young people.

Those who inject drugs and share needles are at higher risk of infection with HIV and HCV and should receive testing for both diseases. Testing is confidential and is often free through testing sites across the state. Health practitioners should also remain aware that people should be tested for both HIV and HCV when drug use is suspected in patients.

Transmission of HIV and HCV can occur when people share or reuse needles and syringes. Hepatitis C can remain viable for up to two months in a syringe. HIV can survive for six weeks in syringes typically used by injectors of illicit drugs. Infection can also be passed through the sharing of materials used to prepare drugs, through open wounds, and from contaminated surfaces. Those who use injectable drugs should be screened for HIV and HCV every 6 months.

For more information about HIV and HCV, please contact your local health unit, your health care provider or the North Dakota Department of Health, Division of Disease Control at 701.328.2378 or www.ndhealth.gov. For more information on where you can get tested, visit <https://gettested.cdc.gov>.

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